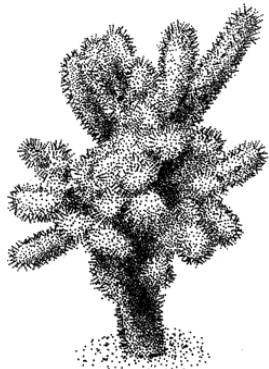


The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy Négritude, Vitalism, and Modernity



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Chapter 4: *Négritude* and the Poetics of Life

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Négritude and the Poetics of Life

If the Dutchman Baruch de Spinoza was the *marrano* of reason, hiding his rationalism, then the Martinican Aimé Césaire was the African of Life, openly affirming his existential vitalism in the face of centuries of humiliation and degradation and in response to the reduction of black humanity in juridical terms to lifeless means of production, to a mere *instrumentum vocale*. There is little less surprising than the vitalism of the enslaved, and it is certainly not a mystery that a volcanically aggressive and liberating voice emerged from Martinique, which, as Michel Rolph Trouillot has noted, imported more slaves than all the U.S. states combined, despite being less than one-fourth the size of Long Island.¹ As a result of this relationship between slavery, colonialism, and the vitalism of the oppressed, the study of *Lebensphilosophie* simply demands that we also become scholars of colonial literature.

Césaire, Léopold Senghor, and their fellow *Négritude* poets were, to put it sharply, poets of a black ancestral myth by which they hoped to awaken a latent feeling of affinity for the common descent of all Africans who had long become separated into seemingly independent groups. They hoped to redefine all blacks as persons joined together in the same familial group.² Through intense collaboration, the *Négritude* poets tried to recover the core of their fabulated common ancestry and to unite themselves around certain shared metaphysical and stylistic assumptions. In his introductory comments to Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, Abiola Irele has incisively identified these core assumptions as a vitalist hyperromanticism—"a vision of restitution to wholeness of experience promised by a reconnection to the life-enhancing values of an ideal Africa, the peasant continent par excellence."³ In his essay "The Spirit of Civilization, or Laws, of Negro-African Culture," Senghor would explicitly introduce the concept of *la force vitale*: "It is the ultimate gift . . . the expression of the vital power. The Negro identifies being with life; more precisely with the vital

force. His metaphysics are an existentialist ontology.”⁴ In her study of Senghor’s poetics, Sylvia Washington Bâ has also underlined the vitalist basis of his commitments: “The moral philosophy and ethical system of black American civilization are based upon participation in and communication of the supreme value, life. Respect for life is projected back in time to include parents, the dead, ancestors, spirits, God, maintaining an unbroken line of communication that remains intact with varying in degrees of life force.”⁵ In a monograph on Senghor, Janice Spleth argues persuasively that his aesthetics are fundamentally vitalist as well:

The importance of rhythm in African societies has a metaphysical basis related to the concept of vital forces. The energy of these forces, which animates all beings, manifests itself in the form of waves whose ebb and flow appears as the weak and strong beats of music or poetry. The act of creating rhythm becomes a means of participating in vital forces of the cosmos. Senghor distinguishes between Western art, which imitates nature, and African art, which is not only social, he tells us, but vital. This is true of all forms of rhythm including the dance, which figures so importantly in religious ceremonies. Unless there is rhythm in poetry, words do not in themselves constitute a creative force. Senghor emphasizes that it was the *parole rythmée* by which God created the universe, not by the world alone.⁶

These judgments echo Jean-Paul Sartre’s introduction to the *Négritude* poets in his *Black Orpheus*. Giving a sociological analysis of *Négritude* as the vitalist expression of a peasant culture in revolt against the engineering culture of the West, he drew on Bergson to describe black epistemology as intuitive of the *inner life* of things as opposed to intellectual, which only grasped the surface of things. He also compared the unity of vegetal and sexual imagery in the *Négritude* poems to images of mineralization of the human in French poetry. So profound was the sympathy for life among the *Négritude* poets that they were taken beyond the chaste and asexual intuition of Bergson, and Sartre quickly descended into an offensive, hyperbolic description of *Négritude* as a “spermatic religion . . . like a tension of the soul balancing two complementary tendencies: the dynamic emotion of being a rising phallus, and that softer, more patient and feminine, of being a plant that grows.”⁷ However exaggerated Sartre’s description, *Négritude* did indeed represent an attempt to plunge deeper than the reactive identity that blacks had formed in response to colonial humiliation and recover a vitalist and romantic personality putatively

disintegration of comforting cosmologies—Césaire creates a returning prophet who matches (as I suggest he was meant to) the description Nietzsche gave of a fictional messiah:

Is this [great health] even possible at this time? . . . But sometime, in a stronger period than this rotten, self-doubting present is, he must come to us, a redeeming person of great love and contempt, the creative spirit, whose surging force always keeps him away from everything remote and beyond, whose solitude is misunderstood by the general population, as if it were an escape *from* reality—while it is only his sinking-into, burying-into, deepening *into* reality, so that, when he eventually comes back into the light, he can bring home the *redemption* of reality: its redemption from the cure laid upon it by the ideal that has been prevailing until now. This person of the future, who redeems us from both this prevailing ideal and *which will grow out of it*, from the great disgust, from the will to nothingness, from nihilism, this bell-stroke of noon and the great decision, which again frees the will, that gives back to the earth its goal, and gives back to people their hope, this Antichrist and antinihilist, this conqueror over God and nothing—*he must come some day*.¹²⁷

Nietzsche had created Zarathustra in this image, and this black Zarathustra, the first-person narrator of *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, will certainly survive his creator, the great Aimé Césaire (1913–2008).

common to those who understood themselves as Guadeloupians, Martinicans, Senegalese, Malians, and other African groups.

It is not surprising that there has been a recovery of *Négritude* among African minorities in neoliberal France today, given the shared sense of disenfranchisement. “Césaire is in my lyrics, and I was upset when people misinterpreted what I wrote as anti-white because *Négritude* is the affirmation of our common black roots,” said the twenty-year-old Youssoupha, recently profiled in an article in the *New York Times* about how *Négritude* and Césaire have made a comeback. Having earned a master’s degree at the Sorbonne only to find himself stuck in low-level work, Youssoupha has taken to writing music. “*Négritude* is a concept they just don’t want to hear about,” he raps in “Render Unto Césaire” on his latest album, *À Chaque Frère* (To Each Brother).⁸

Then, as now, the *Négritude* poets offered Africans the Bergsonian promise of rebecoming who they really are, at least in terms of a return to traditional values if not traditional structures. At the same time, though, the mythic foundations posited and the unity achieved were not timeless but specific products of colonialism in two ways: the *Négritude* poets accepted colonial stereotypes only to valorize, and not transcend, them, and the unity they imagined was not in fact a product of blood or ancestral values but political opposition to colonial rule. The *Négritude* poets, intent on reconnecting blacks around ancestral values, could not properly emphasize their dialogue with the European thought, with which they had profound engagement.

As an important exception to this neglect of European roots, A. James Arnold produced a monograph to show the centrality of Césaire’s engagement with European modernism rather than the Muntu tradition on which the Africanist Janheinz Jahn had focused.⁹ European influences are sometimes admitted, but in the case of the German Romantic anthropologist Leo Frobenius, the debt was highlighted by the *Négritude* thinkers themselves, for Frobenius had essentially only given ethnographic validity to their claims of a core ancestral African identity. To the extent, then, that the ancestral myth is accepted, it is more difficult to admit the importance of the dialogue between *Négritude* and modernism and European anti-intellectualist philosophy.

I shall bring out in this chapter a four-fold debt to Bergson: the dynamics of *duration* provided a framework for the recovery of racial memory, the idea of *the fundamental self* formed the basis of the search for racial authenticity, Bergson’s *critique of the intellect* laid the basis for *Négritude*’s search for experiential modes suited to the magically real immanent in the

lived experience of the Americas, and the poet came to replace the *mystic* at the center of Bergson's ethical theory. A genealogy of postcolonial and modern New World literature cannot fail to engage with Bergson. While my genealogy of the life concept has been intended to lead to Bergson, my discussion here is meant to suggest how paradoxical it is that colonial writers would "forge weapons" out of the "arsenal" of this vitalist form of European irrationalism and counterrevolutionary thought.¹⁰

I shall argue that *Négritude* has been too often caricatured as simply irrationalist and culturally particularist and that a more nuanced reading of Senghor and Césaire reveal both a subtle vitalist epistemology and a complex theory of culture. Indeed, they both developed profound ideas about participant reason and cultural morphology. However, for all their efforts to recover a shared identity, there are important differences between Césaire and Senghor. Senghor openly embraces the life mysticism of race theory, and I shall attend at some length to these reactionary aspects of his vitalism. My focus will then turn to the now well-known differences between Senghor and Césaire in their respective understandings of vitalism: while Senghor's philosophical basis was the Bergsonian traditionalism discussed in the last chapter, Césaire's life philosophy also drew from Nietzsche's vision of Dionysian experience. Unlike Nietzsche, however, Césaire's vision was, in the end, affirming of the existence of all blacks rather than affirming of only what is most intensely vital or healthy in African culture. Because Césaire dared to affirm the whole of black existence—and his great poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* is just the laying bare of the painful journey to this *terminus ad quem* that is a new point of departure—he had no truck with the elitism, eugenics, and thanatopolitics implicit in Nietzsche's *Lebensphilosophie*, even though he could not escape its spiritualization of the biological and its biologization of the spiritual. It bespeaks of Césaire's humanity and greatness that he affirmed the real existence of blacks without blinking at tragic and damaged lives, and as we see, his towering contributions to the flourishing of black life live on after his death at the age of ninety-four in 2008.

What Is Living and Dead in Senghor's Bergsonism?

My analysis of the influence of the *Lebensphilosophie* Henri Bergson on Léopold Sédar Senghor has two motivations: I want to rethink critically the effect of the vitalist forms of antipositivism and antirationalism on

Melanin coloring, and negritude, no longer a cephalic index,
or plasma, or soma, but measured by a compass of suffering

and the Negro every day more base, more cowardly, more sterile,
less profound, more spilled out of himself, more separated from
himself, more wily with himself, less immediate to himself,

I accept, I accept it all

and far from the palatial sea that foams beneath the suppurating
syzygy of blisters, miraculously lying in the despair of my
arms the body of my country, its bones shocked and, in its
veins, the blood hesitating like a drop of vegetal milk at the in-
jured point of a bulb . . .

Suddenly now strength and life assail me like a bull and the
water of life overwhelms the papilla of the more, now all the
veins and veinlets are bustling with new blood and the enor-
mous breathing lung of cyclones and the fire hoarded in vol-
canoes and the gigantic seismic pulse which now beats the
measure of a living body in my firm conflagration.¹²⁴

The narrator's return to the native land culminates in an affirmation of dubious ancestral myths about a metaphysically vitalist inheritance, despite his attempt to define race less in terms of physiology than in terms of a shared history of suffering. Contemporaneously with the early versions of the *Notebook*, Césaire would write in an introduction to Frobenius's writings: "But there flows in our veins a blood which demands of us an original attitude toward life . . . we must respond, the poet more than any other, to the special dynamic of our complex biological reality."¹²⁵ Yet even this affirmation of what we know as pseudobiology speaks of a "passion for the real"; Césaire is attempting to awaken his readers from the dreamscapes, ideologies, and imaginaries of the colonial world and to affirm black life and the cosmos just as they are—perfect.¹²⁶ Existence is perfection: Césaire has radicalized Nietzsche's radical doctrine of *amor fati* for a people whose history of enslavement and suffering are least suited for it, and this is a measure of his accomplishment. For a people who have been taught to loathe who they are and who seek otherworldly solace for the stultification of their daily lives—yet who are in fact immobilized by the

life, the value on whose establishment the overcoming of modern nihilism, they said, depended. Césaire's existential affirmation even extends to the living cosmos. Irele points to the "florid character of his evocations of landscape, which attests to the fascination exerted upon his imagination by the flourishing of life in all its forms in his environment and the aspect of fantasy this imprints upon the tropical scene."¹²² Yet Césaire's affirmation of nature does not depend on a fantasy of its idyllic or its benignly profusive character; nor are the sufferings of nature red in tooth and claw understood to serve a higher purpose, as in the theodicy of social Darwinism. Nature is made neither a Father nor God substitute. Recalling Nietzsche's Heraclitean view of nature, Césaire affirms the innocent cruelty of a polymorphous and incessantly creative nature, powerfully symbolized in Mt. Pelee's spewing out of volcanic lava. In "Poetry and Cognition," Césaire would speak of the need for myth to restore our meaningful emotional responses to the sun, the moon, the rain, and the breath and to rediscover in rapture and fear the pulsating, living newness of the world. Yet even this call for myth is justified as a return to certain truths lost since the first days of man. Césaire's primitivism is both mythic and naturalistic.

The *Notebook* is indeed a work of myth, surrealist technique, and vitalism. But it is also a work of total, existential affirmation. Lukács argued that the irrational *Lebensphilosophs* rejected existence for the affirmation of life. He felt that the horrific effects of the First World War were registered in the substitution of existence for the life concept: "The emphatic stress on existence instead of life, even in contrast to life, expressed precisely this fear of becoming inessential," and it indicated "a search for the core of genuineness in subjectivity which, it was hoped, man could still endeavor to rescue from the imminent general destruction."¹²³ Césaire's ability to affirm life, however, is predicated on an affirmation of existence.

Césaire accepts his physical inheritance against colonial somatic prejudice, he accepts the ignominy of blacks' present condition against attempts to escape to a mythic past or transcendent future, and he accepts the childlike violence and fecundity of the natural world of which he rightly understands himself an evanescent and fragile expression.

... I accept

and the determination of my biology, not a prisoner to a facial angle, to a type of hair, to a well-flattened nose, to a clearly

colonial and postcolonial theory, and I want to suggest lines of criticism of today's renascent Bergsonism, of which Senghor was a brilliant and self-conscious exponent.

While Bergson's faith in creative evolution, guided by an *élan vital*, was shattered by the Great War and the decline of the West it had seemed to engender, Senghor exuded optimism over the fate of African humanity, whose renaissance, he believed, would guide Europe out of its own calamity. Senghor attempted to give intellectual confidence to not only the validity of African culture but also the immediate cultural possibilities for the intuition of absolute knowledge, the reconciliation of man with nature, the possibility of communion with the living and the dead, and the immortality of the human spirit. In all these efforts, his language was Bergsonian.

In a historically rich account of the cultural contradictions of French imperial rule, Gary Wilder has recently emphasized Senghor's philosophical roots in vitalist philosophy:

Senghor maintains that blacks are organically connected to the natural world that they represent poetically. . . . He then relates this racially derived connection with the physical world to a specifically Negro-African epistemology, a form of black cognition that transcends the European distinction between subject and object. . . . *Négritude* may thus be related to a tradition of European vitalist thinking. . . . Black poetry, he believes, entails an unmediated expression of the cosmological life force. . . . He is attempting to elaborate an alternative, antipositivist form of reason and way of knowing. European modernism and irrational philosophy were engaged in a similar critical project. Senghor's move, like those of a number of cultural anthropologists of this period, was to define this difference in biocultural terms. This may be a conceptually indefensible and politically dubious gesture.¹¹

Through excellent translations of some important passages, Wilder reestablishes the textual case in support of Senghor's own judgment of the importance of Bergsonian vitalism to his thought. While I shall try to add to this textual support, I shall focus on broadening the critical discussion beyond the problem of naïve biologism, which Christopher Miller has shown did not infect all of Senghor's contemporaries.¹² For a properly deconstructive analysis, the problems of antipositivist reason as well as irrationalism need to be explored with the limitations of their antitheses. To discuss Senghor's ideas critically, I have found myself in dialogue with

Abiola Irele's "What is *Négritude*?" first published in 1977.¹³ His groundbreaking essays are referenced, though not often quoted, but the crispness of Irele's formulations of Senghor's key ideas facilitates the critical engagement with vitalism I shall encourage.

A dialectical thinker, Irele attempts to free Senghor's thinking from common misapprehensions and stereotypes, the better to hone in on the real difficulties. Of Senghor's rigid essentialization of the African personality and recourse to traditional African values, Irele grants that the objections of critics such as Stanislas Adotevi and Marcien Towa may well be valid. Indeed, he sharply summarizes the counterarguments to Senghor's position:

The criticism that *Négritude* itself proceeds from an insufficient understanding of the dynamic nature of African sociological realities finds its corollary in this objection on the practical plane. Because it postulates a narrow and rigid framework of social expression in traditional African culture, it is also felt to offer little possibility of meaningful social action in the present. The recourse to traditionalism, to the value of the past as a global reference, gives *Négritude* the character of conservatism which is felt to be at variance with the exigencies of the moment. And the spiritualist terms in which even the theory of African socialism is cast in Senghor's writings give his ideas an air of unreality that seem to bear no relation to the practical issues of socio-economic and technological development.

(84–85)

Yet Irele suggests that the critics had not understood how Senghor forged for a deprived group "a sustaining vision of the collective self and its destiny" and thereby allowed Africans "to project themselves beyond their immediate experience" and particular historical situation.¹⁴ There is a suggestion here of the critics' ingratitude; we do not create art in conditions of our own making, and had Senghor not made the most of the horrific conditions into which he was thrown, the African spirit of resistance may not have survived to outgrow the framework of *Négritude*. It is not that Irele denies the force of Adotevi's and Towa's criticisms in strictly philosophical terms; simply put, he suggests that the criticisms are anachronistic, though Miller's important archival research now leaves no doubt that many of Senghor's contemporaries were wary of any assertion of foundational, ethnic identity on the basis of ancestral determinism, given their commitment to a historical materialism centered on exploitation and universal emancipation.

shadow), I may as well confess that we were at all times pretty mediocre dishwashers, shoeblacks without ambition, at best conscientious sorcerers and the only unquestionable record that we broke was that of endurance under the *chicote* . . .¹¹⁸

One of the most famous scenes of the poem is Césaire's encounter with a broken black man ridiculed by fellow passengers on a tram. In giving a mirror to his complicit loathing, Césaire enacts a turning away from colonial racism and a return to all of black existence, affirmed without idealization of a great or royal African past or overlooked due to a mental escape for future utopia. He has instead exaggerated a history of abject mediocrity. Césaire even implores his readers to recognize that resistance does not always yield rewards. He recalls that the history of the diaspora has been marked by "monstrous putrefaction of stymied revolts." He writes bitterly that during the century-long era of slavery acts of historical agency could only be ascertained in the "good" (docile) nigger's ability to endure the whip. All of it, he tells us in a refrain, "I accept, I accept it all."¹¹⁹ To use Robert Wicks's most important distinction, Césaire has affirmed not life but existence.¹²⁰

For the fascist *Lebensphilosophs*, lives haunted by such brokenness, tragedy, damage, and spiritual sickness were lives not worth affirming but already dead, and they could therefore be put to death. As Roberto Esposito puts it:

that death is juridically irreproachable not so much because it is justified by more pressing collective demands, but because the persons whom it strikes are *already* dead. The meticulous lexical research of those expressions that correspond to their diminished situation—"half-men," "damaged beings," "mentally dead," "empty human husks" (*Leere-Menschenhülsen*), "human ballast" (*Ballast-existenzen*)—has precisely the objective of demonstrating that in their case death does not come from outside, because from the beginning it is part of those lives—or, more precisely, of these *existences* because that is the term that follows from the subtraction of life from itself.¹²¹

Césaire is not implicated at all in a fascist thanatopolitics; on the contrary, he affirms the lives that fascists considered unworthy of life. He has none of that hardness toward the soft and weak, on whose destruction vitalist champions of cultural health had predicated the intensification of

Arnold and Nick Nesbitt are quite severe in their criticism of Césaire. Even Gregson Davis thinks Césaire does not fully escape the problem.¹¹⁴ Butler locates the same problem in Deleuze's posing as "an ahistorical absolute" his "arcadian vision of precultural libinidal chaos."¹¹⁵ What I have tried to understand—and here I am indebted to the protocols of deconstructive reading—is how Césaire could be led back at times against his own predispositions to an ahistoric naturalism of racial biologism and noumenal racialism, not through a simple failure to break with racist culture but paradoxically through his very attempt to rise vigorously and vitally above, to take flight from the oppressive racial culture that he had inherited. The price of immanence was a naïve biologism, and Césaire's heroic poetics reveal race to be the tragedy that it is.

Yet I cannot agree with Nesbitt's argument that there is a fascist dimension to Césaire's poetics: "While manifestly antithetical to social oppression in hindsight, Césaire's references to pre-rational immediacy and 'Negro blood' in 1942 and 1945 merely invert and hence participate in the ideological categories of Hitlerian fascism."¹¹⁶ It short-circuits the argument to dismiss prerational immediacy or prerational intuition as simply fascist, even though such irrationalism did often prove itself politically retrograde. Yet what makes this charge inapposite are the implications of Césaire's affirmation not of just what is vital in black life but in of all black existence.

While Gary Wilder has argued that Césaire's *Notebook* refuses to accept "the empirical coordinates of given reality" and turns to "the imagination as a refuge from the given world," the poem actually dwells on death, petrification, hunger, and disease—the lifeless existence of a cadaverous *Négritude*.¹¹⁷ Césaire declaims: "I will withhold nothing." He tears away the softening veils of beautiful idealizations of Antillean life for a look at unvarnished reality:

I refuse to pass off my puffiness for authentic glory.
 And I laugh at my former childish fantasies.
 No, we've never been Amazons of the King of Dahomey, nor
 princes of Ghana with eight hundred camels, nor wise men in
 Timbuktu under Askia the Great, nor the architects of Djenné,
 nor Mahdis, nor warriors. We don't feel under our armpit the
 itch of those who in the old days carried a lance. And since I
 have sworn to leave nothing out of our history (I who love nothing
 better than a sheep grazing his own afternoon

Reviewing the black press in French, Miller concludes that the writers "seem to ban the cataloging or celebration of *inherited culture*, the cornerstone of essentialism. The past appears to be nothing but ruins. The only road open to the reader is political."¹⁵

Senghor could have developed a historicist critique of the notorious (and still all-too-common) positivist alchemical conversion of temporary "race" differences, themselves products of a violent history and social conditions, into "empirical proof" of deep, inherited, and immutable divisions existing, as it were, outside of time. To be sure, while trapped by racial logic (here we have his troubling indulgence of Arthur de Gobineau, though it should be remembered that the aristocrat's theory of degeneration by interbreeding was not premised naturalistically on the belief in the differentially evolved humanity of the races, and Gobineau's cultural Aryanism was not viewed as anti-Semitic in the early twentieth century),¹⁶ Senghor strove to turn hard differences into soft ones, the clash of cultures into their future communion. But Senghor accepted race differences as they were; it may well have seemed otherworldly to keep the faith that such differences would be dissolved at some abstract future date: the history of slavery, colonialism, and racism would not soon be magically overcome, as our present confirms. Moreover, a dialectical Marxist approach could seem to call for the sacrifice of his generation and its ancestors in the name of the future transcendent race. For Senghor, the task became to reinterpret the extant, not distance from it from some future, utopian point. The living and the dead had to be vindicated; it was not simply a matter of the liberation of future generations. As Irele notes:

Senghor's aim . . . is to explain what constitutes the difference as far as the black African is concerned, and to demonstrate the originality of his culture and by implication of Negro subcultures in the New World: the originality and the *validity* of their fundamental spirit. . . . Senghor's advocacy of *Négritude* does not imply therefore a simple return to outmoded customs and institutions—the point needs to be stressed, I think—but rather to an original spirit which gave meaning to the life of the individual in traditional African society.

(73)

Since Africans were dismissed through positivist freeze-framing as congenitally antitechnological and "pre-logical," Senghor seems to have felt that he had no option but to avail himself of the only theoretical vocabulary in

which the validity of this putatively alien mode of cognition could be defended. As Irele argued in a crucially important passage, that vocabulary was found in the Bergsonian vitalist form of irrationalism and the anthropology it informed:

The terms in which Senghor formulates his theory of *Négritude* resound with distinct echoes of the work of a whole group of writers, thinkers and scholars in the West who can be situated within a single perspective—that of the anti-intellectual current in European thought. The specific derivation of some of his concepts is easily identifiable—his notion of “vital force” for example, can be attributed to Father Placide Tempels’ now classic study of Bantu philosophy, while that of “participation,” as well as his distinction between the traditional forms of the collective mentality in Europe and Africa respectively, owes much to the work of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl. Both Lévy-Bruhl and Tempels derive in turn from Bergson: the former explored in his work the anthropological implications of Bergson’s reflections, whereas the latter applied his categories, particularly the concept of the “life surge” (*élan vital*) specifically to the Bantu. It is not only in this remote way that Bergson figures in Senghor’s *Négritude* but as a direct influence. To Bergson, Senghor owes the concept of intuition on which revolves his explication of the African mind and consciousness. Bergson abolished with this concept the positivist dichotomy of subject-object, and proposed a new conception of authentic knowledge as immediacy of experience, the organic involvement of the subject with the object of his experience. It is largely the epistemology of Bergson that Senghor has adopted in his formulation of *Négritude*.

(80)

The evaluation of Senghor’s work thus depends largely on what critical use he made of Bergsonism and whether he was himself trapped by its failings.

Irele makes clear that vitalism works here both as an ontology and an epistemology. Let me first turn to Irele’s discussion of Bergsonian ontology:

The essential idea in Senghor’s aesthetic theory is that the African arrives at a profound knowledge of the world by feeling the material world to the cosmic mind of which it is an emanation, to the transcendental reality underlying it—what Senghor calls, in a modification of Breton’s term, *la sous-réalité*. . . . The spirit of African civilization is resumed in a Negro-

volves time more crucially than space simply because “tradition is handed down over time, not across space.”¹⁰⁹ Césaire’s return to African roots does not, in the end, fail to effect what Roberto Esposito has called a triple enclosure of subjects to the demands of their physiognomic specificities, their imagined community, and their fabulated genealogy; the triple enclosure is symbolized in the multiple references by Senghor and Césaire to blood (*sang*), which implies this more ramified, biocultural inheritance that cannot be symbolized by today’s “gene,” our contemporary synecdoche for the whole of intergenerational transmission.¹¹⁰ So enclosed by blood, stuck inside an “Afrocentric reverie,” and obsessed with a return, *Négritude* proved an obstacle to the appreciation of the non-African elements of Caribbean culture that blacks enjoyed, had made, and were making with others.¹¹¹

Césaire’s Nietzschean antidialectics created such problems; indeed, these problems are only comprehensible once we understand how far Nietzsche took Césaire from Hegel. As already suggested, Sartre defined *Négritude* in dialectical or Hegelian terms, as self-annulling negation and as a self-dissolving form of antiracist racism. But this logic of negative determination misses the function of affirmation in *Négritude*’s relationship to Africa. Yet if affirmation refuses the Hegelian external negation of existing forces in search of selfhood through a conceptual dialectical process, then affirmation has to somehow begin with itself, with an irreducible, original foundation. This is the only way to escape mediation by others. There has to be the possibility of an immediate affirmation of specific, immediate qualities. For Deleuze, the strong man’s affirmation of himself is “rooted in his own feeling of power and vitality.”¹¹² Césaire is certainly aristocratic in this sense. Or, to put it another way, Césaire is not the sheep of Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals*: he does not attempt to define *Négritude* in terms of what Africans hate and then impose anti-Western values on whom they hate; rather, he attempts to affirm in the first place who Africans are. Césaire’s *Négritude* is modeled on Nietzsche’s eagle, whose own self-affirmation determines its difference from the sheep: the eagle’s sense of the sheep’s baseness only affirms its own self-affirmation.¹¹³ The problem, however, is with the metaphor of the invisible inside, the internal noumenal that is productive of the difference of *Négritude*. Rooted internally and defined outside mediation, it easily collapses into a biological substratum, even though Césaire struggled throughout his career to avoid this tragedy with his noble attempt not to have blacks defined even negatively by a culture that had despised and dehumanized them. However, this descent to the biological indeed haunted Césaire’s work, and James

for the happy ending of dealienation, of returning to man the powers he has alienated in blindly making history.

The idea of return to a native land is thus misleading, because it suggests above all else not the *terminus ad quem* of the reoccupation of old territory (*pays natal*) but the very process of deterritorialization in which the black body was to become, to use Deleuze and Guattari's awkward expression, without organs, that is, to achieve a form of somatic existence free from colonial, racist rule and no longer tortured, humiliated, semiotized, and degraded but liberated to resist the identity imposed by the territorializing processes of the imperial *Socius*. Césaire's poetics retain their significance because they represented more than a crack in rigid colonial society—cracks there had long been; Césaire transformed that crack into a full rupture, shattering the image of colonial black subjects in both form and content and freeing them to take a place on the plane of creativity, desire, possibility, experiment, and even death and destruction. Long before Deleuze and Guattari, Césaire had celebrated what Nik Fox has called “the death of the majoritarian individual subject by invoking experimental modes of consciousness which are excluded from normalizing reason such as those esoteric and Dionysian practices which involve rapture, excess and intoxication.”¹⁰⁷

Reason, I crown you evening wind.

Your name voice of order?

To me the whip's corolla.

Beauty I call you the false claim of the stone.

But ah! My raucous laughter

Smuggled in

Ah! My saltpeter treasure!

Because we hate you and your reason, we claim kinship with

Dementia praecox with the flaming madness of persistent
cannibalism¹⁰⁸

To be sure, Césaire shied away from what he was doing. And the poem does speak of a conservative, if not Heideggerian, rejection of faraway places for an authentic *Dasein*. That is, Césaire's return is a gambit that greater possibilities are to be found in the history of a rooted people that looks back beyond the birth of a single individual than in the insights of contemporary foreign writers. Despite the geographical import of the return to a native land, the poem presumes that the life of black *Dasein* in-

African ontology, which identifies *being* with life, with “vital force.” This vitalist philosophy which Senghor attributes to the African explains the traditional forms of religious experience and expression on the continent. By his emotive and mystical disposition, and by the very fact of his intimate insertion into an organic milieu, the African is naturally a religious being, in whom the sense of the sacred is acutely alive. He communes directly with nature and with the elements, and through these, with the absolute fountain-head of vital force, God himself.

(76–77)

Here Senghor's concept of *la sous-réalité* may be closer to *surrealism* and its synonym, *surnaturalism*, as first used in the literature by Apollinaire in the introduction to his play *Les mamelles de Tiréasias* [The Breasts of Tiresias], than it is to Breton's meaning in *Manifeste du surréalisme* (1924). Apollinaire attempted to illuminate the superreality beyond simply experienced reality. The emphasis is not on irrational layers of the self, which are explored in the unconscious, dreams, and humor (René Ménéil would attend to these layers). There is thus an important distance between Senghor's *Négritude* and Breton's Dadaism. This distance also indicates Senghor's attempt to reinterpret the European irrationalist revolt against science and empiricism as a suprarationalism.

Here Senghor becomes an essentialist. His essentialization of the African personality has so much been the focus of critical attention that his essentialization of the object of cognition has escaped criticism. In an incisive reading, Janet Vaillant notes Senghor's essentialism but does not challenge it:

According to Senghor, the African perceives the outside world with all of his senses simultaneously. He approaches each object gently, anxious not to harm it, eager to comprehend it *whole*, for he assumes that he shares with it and all else in the world certain essential qualities. What interests the African is less the superficial appearance of an object than its inner meaning, less its external sign than its sense. And the sense is not its use in a material way, but its moral and mystical significance. The black man goes beyond and behind daylight reality to the *essence* beneath. To this extent, he might seem to share the aesthetic of the modernist poet or the Surrealist in his rejection of the importance of superficial appearance. Unlike the European Surrealist, however, who downplays the importance of external appearance because he thinks that all experience is subjective,

the African minimizes the importance of external appearance because he knows that is only the surface manifestation of *an underlying reality*. That underlying reality, not his own mind, is the focus of his interest. Knowledge of material objects is simply a means to understand the *essence* and order of the world. That order is *the only* important reality, and has an existence quite apart from any of its individual manifestations, including himself.¹⁷

Senghorian epistemology is conservative because it claims that there is in fact an important underlying reality and that knowledge of it is possible, but this suggests (as Nelson Goodman protested against Bergson) that since there is an ultimate reality behind our representations there cannot in fact be many ways the world is, with multiple correct versions each capturing only one of the many ways the world is.¹⁸ There is a devaluation here of the constitutive power of language to make reality in multiple ways, leaving us with no metaphysical presence on the basis of which to arbitrate our conflicting ways of worldmaking.

Senghor was beholden to this theological belief in an ultimate underlying reality, and it was vital force into which both matter and life were dissolved. Senghor was a pantheist. God, pantheistically and immanently defined, remained the supreme object of knowledge. The Jesuit Placide Tempel's ethnophilosophy seemed to reveal the vitalist nature of African "ontotheology" (Tempel's confirmed the earlier findings of Leo Frobenius, whose ethnography had already been enthusiastically assimilated). Being, Tempel's argued, is life force for the Bantu. All is being, and force operates differentially through different kinds of beings, with the human being representing the greatest medium of the life force.

Senghor had already put *Négritude* on vitalist foundations in the 1930s through his embrace of Frobenius's ethnographic evidence for the popular African acceptance of animist beliefs. Indeed, as I shall discuss in greater detail below, the early *Négritude* thinkers welcomed the findings of Frobenius just as the early modern Germans had celebrated the rediscovery of Tacitus. Referred to as the *maitre à penser*, Frobenius was indeed the Tacitus of the *Négritude* thinkers.¹⁹ One remembers that the partisans of the German Empire had read Tacitus very differently from the way he was read by Pope Pius II, who, according to Bruce Lincoln, focused on the descriptions of the Germans as "rude barbarians, whose material and cultural existence was severely impoverished in order to argue German knowledge of all higher things had come through the influence of the

liberate the active force of a new way of being—at once modernist and neo-African and yet neither, a way of being that his society (and perhaps ours) was unable to recognize.¹⁰¹ For Césaire understood, unlike Senghor, that the profound African self to which he inspired "a return" was indeed a construct not given simply in and through a Bergsonian duration but also through his own creation over the lacunae that history had violently created for the New World African, the gaps and breaks caused by the Atlantic slave trade. Just as for Gaston Bachelard duration was an active construct, so was it too for Césaire: the fundamental break with Bergson is on the same point, explicitly for Bachelard and implicitly and incompletely for Césaire.¹⁰² To be sure, he equivocates on the ontological status of the living African heritage as both an already existing entrenched legacy and a reconstitution, that is, "a reinvention of ghosts past despite ruptures that have broken linear continuity."¹⁰³ As Robert Bernasconi has incisively shown, it was just this tension in Césaire's work between the myth of inertial tradition and modernist experimentation with which Frantz Fanon would struggle.¹⁰⁴ As we will see, Césaire is as interested in exposing wish fulfillment as what that entrenched legacy is to the reality principle as he is in recovering the African heritage as it in fact is. And in this double operation he does show the legacy to have the contingent character of "something constantly constructed and reinvented."¹⁰⁵

And Césaire's *Négritude* is modernist in yet another way, for he claimed above all else "the freedom to transgress the limits of what one is presently capable of being or doing, rather than just the freedom to be or do those things"¹⁰⁶ and transgress those boundaries not first and foremost through determinate negation but affirmation of positive difference. An active force in Deleuze's Nietzschean sense, *Négritude* affirms positive difference as a multiplicity and difference from inherited blackness and thus self: difference is made the object of enjoyment and affirmation, and, as Gregson Davis has shown, the poem opens itself to plural black identities. In this sense, Césaire's return is much more open ended and radical than the young Marx's Schillerian sense of communism as a double return: return as a regaining at a higher level of the point from which man originally started and as a reappropriation of all that man has alienated from himself in the course of history. As Davis has noted, there is little sense in saying Césaire's epic hero has returned not simply because the starting point no longer exists but because the hero, like Odysseus, has himself been so transformed through his discarding of personae as to cast into doubt his identity over time. Moreover, Césaire suffers no illusion in history as fated

notes, Deleuze also considered Hegel's dialectic anti-life, arguing that it serves to bury life-affirming desire.⁹⁸ The subject is after all forced to submit to the patient labor of the negative, which entails an acquiescence to the necessity and *rationality* of what already is if only then to negate it. The Hegelian subject has not a sufficiently vigorous sense of self to begin with its own self-transcending fecundity; rather, its sense of self is derived from the negative evaluation of the other, its beginning point.

Vital Difference

I can now elaborate on why I am uncomfortable with the idea that Césaire's poetics were structured by a Kojévian idea of determinate negation other than there being no real evidence that he had read or heard of Kojève or had read Hegel carefully. Nesbitt records Césaire's note to Senghor that he had read the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but this was after 1939, the year the *Notebook* appeared. Césaire's later enthusiastic discovery of Hegel also seems to weaken the argument that he had already been aware of Kojève's rendition of this philosophy when he conceived the *Notebook*.⁹⁹ Césaire was simply not a Hegelian. While negation and critique imply the determinate negation of given or inherited identities, they proceeded for Césaire only upon a prior affirmation of fundamental African selves. Césaire's fundamental black is fundamental in two ways: fundamental in terms of the retrieval of real, living heritage against a false tradition in which social roles are given as things, and fundamentally true to lived experience beneath concepts and reason. The *Négritude* poets imagined themselves as carriers of positive difference and affirmed the productivity of their own desire. In this way, Césaire was more than a poet of revolt; he attempted to create a line of flight. In other words, his flight does not take the form of "flight *from* something." It is rather "a pure movement *out* of something . . . a matter of *taking flight*."¹⁰⁰ Césaire's return is a fishing into and a moving out of a great black hole—the images at the end of the *Notebook*.

Yet Césaire's blackness does not simply fit any dominant conceptual categories, not even those of the homeland to which he is ostensibly returning but from which he has become natally alienated, to use Orlando Patterson's conception in a very different context. Nor can his blackness be defined as simply determinate negation in which the negated cannot but be carried over. His *Négritude* has at points all the attributes of the singular, the vital, and the multiple, because his return is meant to affirm and

Church wherefore an appropriately grateful German empire ought to submit to the Roman pontiff." The partisans, however, focused on Tacitus's description of "German honor and integrity, physical prowess, courage and beauty, their defense of liberty against Rome." As Lincoln notes, Tacitus's text bolstered northern pride by breaking the Mediterranean monopoly on antiquity.²⁰ Frobenius's text seemed to break for the *Négritude* thinkers the Western monopoly on cultural validity and creation. But in fact, Frobenius and Tempels read Western vitalism and its romantic revolt against positivism and mechanism into African culture, shaping its animism into an antidote to the malaise of their own cultures and inscribing a vitalist epistemology into the African personality itself.

Vaillant describes well Senghor's mystical univocal ontology:

Africans believe there is a single life force that manifests itself in a variety of ways. Its enhancement is the highest good. Without it, nothing can exist. Everything visible in the world, rising from a grain of sand, through animals, to man, to his ancestors, finally to God, is connected to and dependent on it. All are part of a single whole. The life force itself, however, can appear only in and through these various forms of being and so is dependent on them in turn. Therefore the black African is careful to harm nothing and no one unnecessarily. Indeed his duty is to enhance all forms of life and through them to strengthen the life force upon which he also depends. The African goal is to live in harmony with all being.²¹

In *African Philosophy in Search of an Identity*, D. A. Masolo argues that the vitalist Bantu ontology (Tempels's understanding of which Senghor echoed) differs from Bergson's: "Bergson's dualism makes a clear distinction between the force and the matter on which it works change. In contrast, the Bantu, according to Tempels, appear not to be able to make this distinction; for them matter and force merge into a unity in which force subordinates matter under its dynamism. Being is force, declares Tempels."²² As noted, Irele reads Tempels as a Bergsonian who does not seem to have been a dualist. Indeed, Bergson himself dismisses (at least at times) matter from his cosmology in order to reintroduce it as a myth projected on nature only for the purposes of technical mastery. Bergson, in fact, propounded a monism of a mnemonic force that was most effective in the human being. Bergson attempted to dissolve the qualitative distinction between matter and mind in terms of degrees of duration, tension, and extensity. This ontological monism has rightfully confounded interpreters: the most difficult

idea here is that as consciousness relaxes, it approaches matter in its extensity and separateness. The mind can thus get into the inside of matter because mind and matter only differ in degree.²³

Here is the crucial passage from Bergson's *Creative Evolution*:

The more we succeed in making ourselves conscious of our progress in pure duration, the more we feel different parts of our being enter into each other, and our whole personality concentrates itself in a point, or rather a sharp edge, pressed against the future and cutting into it unceasingly. It is in this that life and action are free. But suppose we let ourselves go and, instead of acting, dream. At once the self is scattered; our past, which till then was gathered together into the indivisible impulsion it communicated to us, is broken up into a thousand recollections *made external to one another*. They give up interpenetrating in the degree that they become fixed. Our personality thus descends in the direction of space. It coasts around it continually in sensation. We will not dwell here on a point we have studied elsewhere. Let us merely recall that *extension admits of degrees*, that all sensation is extensive in a certain measure, and that the idea of unextended sensations, artificially localized in space, is a mere view of the mind, suggested by an unconscious metaphysic much more than by psychological observation. No doubt we make only the first steps in the direction of the extended, even when we let ourselves go as much as we can. But suppose for a moment that matter consists in this very moment pushed further, and that physics is simply psychics inverted.²⁴

Reversing eighteenth-century materialism, Bergson argues for the logical and even historical priority of psychics to physics, but how could matter be understood as a byproduct of life, which, after all, is only a recent, isolated, and sadly fleeting efflorescence in a vast cosmos of inorganic bodies? The bizarre idea is that by self-intuition of our most relaxed states of mind, in which the past is not condensed and thereby interpenetrated with the present as in our truly characteristic actions, we can understand from the inside the nature of matter! Matter and mind are reduced to *durée*. If for Bergson force is most relaxed in matter and tightly coiled in only the free subject, the Bantu (according to Tempels and after him Senghor) also understood being in terms of a hierarchy of force. For Senghor this suprarational, ontological commitment to an all-pervading force allowed the human, as highest form of being, to take itself and all other beings, whether trees, winds,

negative relation for its own identity; hence, it lacks the power of self-assertion and self-affirmation characteristic of the “strong” person, the *ubermensch*, whose relations with others transcend radical dependency. The Nietzschean will, on the other hand, does not affirm itself apart from a context of alterity, but differs from Hegelian desire in its fundamental approach to alterity. Because distinction is no longer understood as a prerequisite for identity, otherness no longer presents itself as that to be “labored upon,” superseded or conceptualized; rather, difference is the condition for enjoyment, an enhanced sense of pleasure, the acceleration and intensification of the play of forces which constitute what we might well call Nietzsche's version of *jouissance*.⁹⁵

For Nietzsche, *ressentiment* is in essence a need to direct one's view outward instead of back to oneself; indeed, he emphasized that slave morality always first needs a hostile external world—that is, it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all. Michael Hardt would also emphasize the centrality to Deleuze's thought of Nietzsche's critique of Hegel's dialectics in the name of positive difference.⁹⁶ Deleuze always underlined his debt to Marx, and Marx's critique of Hegel's notion of the negation of the negation does anticipate Deleuze's. Bhikhu Parekh summarizes Marx's view:

Following Feuerbach, Marx argues that although the negation of the negation is a necessary stage, it is not the goal of the dialectic. The entity resulting from the negation of the negation is not self-grounded, self-originating, and valid for itself. It postulates its existence through what it negates, and is therefore burdened with its opposite. In other words the negation of the negation is a negative and parasitic stage, and does not represent the true or the absolute positive. . . . The negation of negation thus plays the self-contradictory and peculiar role of both preserving and abolishing an entity, of securing both its denial and preservation, denial and affirmation. Since Hegel rejects an entity at one level to reinstate it at another, his negation of the negation never involves its annulment or abolition, and only sanctifies the status quo.⁹⁷

For Marx, the vision of communism as the negation of its negation, private property, was ultimately destructive, because communists would then as a matter of identity be forced to destroy everything that is not being capable of being possessed by all, for example, talents. Marx tied an almost Nietzschean kind of *ressentiment* to Hegel's negation of the negation. As Butler

sensibility of the pulsating life force pervading the universe.⁹³ Rather than preaching a salvific change in the modes of practical labor, Césaire's emphasis is on transformation in cognitive modes. For this reason, James Arnold is correct that Césaire's later sympathy for Marxism is at odds with his early idealist vision.

The Césaire of *Notebook* simply cannot be seen through the Hegelian-Marxist dialectic of recognition and labor, for he simply could not have found in slave labor the possibility of *Bildung*. Nor could he have believed that any master would confer, or was even interested in conferring, recognition on the slave. Moreover, if the slave has to struggle for recognition, it is doubtful that it can be achieved. Recognition seems not to fall into the class of things that can be won through struggle; if it is imposed, it is simply not genuine.⁹⁴ A civil right as a right is not like the recognition of self-consciousness by another self-consciousness. Césaire would have dismissed as Sisyphean if not pathetic the slave's cry for recognition.

He simply does not care one whit about the recognition of the other (or the educative function of gang labor!). Here—and the irony cannot be lost—Nietzsche, an often crude exponent of eugenics, emboldened Césaire to rise above the need for confirmation, which can only imply conformation. Here are the roots of what is often perceived as the volcanic aggression of his poetics and the unapologetic call for violence in his student Fanon. I am not even convinced that Césaire attempted *first* to see himself from the perspective of others only to reject parodically inherited and imposed identities. Césaire is more sympathetically understood as someone who took himself to be affirming in the first place positive difference, not even engaging in Hegelian determinate negations. The poem is more than just the staging of the rejection of various internalizations of hostile others' phenomenal reality of one's self or one's "race." Césaire is better understood as an aristocrat in Deleuze's Nietzschean sense than as a Kojévian Hegelian subject. In her masterful analysis of Deleuze's anti-Hegelianism, Judith Butler has written:

For Deleuze as for Nietzsche, the Hegelian subject is the false appearance of autonomy; as a manifestation of slave morality, this subject is *reactive* rather than self-generating. Nietzsche finds the ideal of autonomy better satisfied in the will-to-power of what, in the *Genealogy of Morals*, is understood as an aristocratic value of life-affirming physical strength, the moral position beyond envy. . . . If the subject only exists through the assimilation of an external opposition, it therefore is dependent upon this

or animals, into fellowship and apply the skills of social interaction.²⁵ As Senghor wrote in this essay of 1939, "Ce que l'homme noir apporte":

People speak of their [Negro-African] *animism*; I will say their anthropo-psychism. Which is not necessarily negrocentrism, as we will see below. Thus, all of Nature is animated by a human presence. It humanizes itself, in the etymological and the real senses of the word. Not only animals and the phenomena of nature—rain, wind, thunder, mountain, river—but also the tree and the pebble become men.²⁶

Senghor's vitalist ontology was radically egalitarian and noninstrumental, but it also had the same damaging consequences of Bergsonism generally—a devaluation of the scientific aptitude and technological skills on which the African future inevitably depended and the access to which Africans had been denied through the centuries of slave trade and colonialism.

As is well known, Senghor shared in this widespread rejection of instrumental, Western reason and argued for the higher truth value of African participant reason. As noted, Senghor essentialized both the object and the subject. I shall soon turn to the latter, but I want to dwell on Senghor's "epistem-the-ology" aimed at the essence of the object. What is cognitively superior about participant reason? Irele's answer is still the best available:

Senghor has singled out, as the dominant trait of this [African] consciousness, its emotive disposition. He presents the African as being, in his physical constitution, a being of emotion. . . . The African's response to the external world in Senghor's conception is an upsurge in sensibility, at the level of the nervous system, an intense, engulfing experience in which the whole organic being of the self is involved. . . . However, notwithstanding the profound association between [the African's] constitution and his emotivity, the African's response to reality is not a mere instinctive reaction, but is an expression of an intention. . . . In other words, the emotive response of the African is an act of cognition, in which the subject and object enter into an organic and dynamic relationship, and in which the intense perception through the senses culminates in the conscious apprehension of reality. . . . The African's apprehension amounts to "living the object" in the depth of his soul, penetrating to the sensuous perception of its essence.²⁷

This essentialism of the object or, rather, identification with the essence of the object does not read well in light of Nietzschean perspectivism and

Derridean deconstruction. But Irele's insistence that Senghor not be understood as an instinctualist remains important to our understanding of the thinker. Senghor highlights the cognitive importance of affectual response for the dance with the object by which it alone can be known; for Senghor, a person is not a substance but someone with whom one has a relation, and in the animist worldview, fauna, weather patterns, and animals can all be persons and related to as such. With animism as its ontological presupposition, participant reason enters into or intuits the life of the object, follows its fluid movement, and cognizes the creative evolution of life's respective forms. Senghor lyricized what he referred to as the African's participatory conception of reason and thus participatory relation to the object world and life itself. In extolling an African mode of knowledge, which "coincides here with the being of the object in its originating and original reality, in its discontinuity and indeterminacy: in its life," Senghor means nothing other than Bergsonian immediacy: participant reason is intuition by another name.²⁸

Having underlined this debt to Bergson, I would qualify Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze's claim that Senghor is well understood as "Africa's Kant."²⁹ In his thoughtful study of the relation between philosophy and race, Eze justifies this interpretation by intimating that Senghor attempted to deuniversalize Kantian a priori categories by specifying and biologizing the determinate "physical and psychological structures of [African] perception."³⁰ For Eze, the influence of Lévy-Bruhl's *Primitive Mentality*, a work Senghor himself cited, is clear. One should not, however, conflate Lévy-Bruhl's conception of participation with Senghor's own anti-Cartesian conception. For the former, the primitive mind is governed by the law of participation between the physical and mystical worlds. Senghor does not (I think) mean to extol this, and he is not best understood as having simply made positive the image of the primitive mind in colonial anthropology, which was instead loosely used to deuniversalize the dominant Western modes of apprehension and to give confidence to Africans that their ways of knowing were not simply inferior and less truthful and no less capable of development than Western ways—and perhaps even more capable, because they were not burdened by scientific and objectivist assumptions that the development of science was undermining.

So by extolling participation, Senghor intends a critique of the spectator view of the world that Dilthey had already developed and, drawing from him, Merleau-Ponty and others would later elaborate. As Dilthey is best understood as a descendant of German Idealism, it is important to

master and bondsman as the *locus classicus* of the Hegelian notion of determinate negation. If the emphasis had been on this aspect of Kojève's reading of Hegel, then the self-consciousness of *le negre* would have been dependent on the recognition of that asserted self-consciousness as a human self-consciousness by the self-consciousness of those who had already denied the humanity of *le negre*. The dialectic of reflection, by which self-consciousness is engendered, is inherently mutual for Hegel, yet the predication of self-esteem on the recognition of the master race is a tragically destructive act, an act sure to yield only shame and violence, internal and external.

Yet, if recognition is a perilous goal, what of the other element of the Hegelian master-bondsman dialectic: work? Though Fanon clearly adopts in *Black Skins, White Masks* a Hegelian view of identity as a struggle for mutual recognition rooted in death-defying desire, he acknowledged in an usually ignored footnote that the white colonial master never depended on the recognition of the slave; he only wanted him reduced to a work animal. That is, he understood Hegel's ideas as too deeply rooted in the possibility of eventual reconciliation to capture the actual violence of the colonial system. As Fanon writes: "For Hegel there is reciprocity; here the master laughs at the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work."⁹⁰ Paul Gilroy, however, seizes on the Hegelian dialectic exactly for its acknowledgement of the irreconcilability of contradiction, slaves thereby having to emancipate themselves forcibly.⁹¹ In this important reading, the struggle for recognition has indeed been displaced, but the role of work has been elided. While for Hegel the bondsman becomes conscious to his own meaning in the product of his labor and is thereby allowed to recover a sense of fulfillment, it is absurd to think that slave labor on the New World plantations served any such educative function and that black intellectuals would embrace the fear and service that Hegel thought the bondsman must endure in order to become objective to himself.⁹² The Hegelian dialectic simply does not seem to fit the experience of African slaves in the New World: it is nonsensical that chained and whipped slaves could see in work a vehicle for self-realization, much less in their whips and chains the necessary conditions for the compulsion of the labor by which their humanity is to be achieved.

Emancipation depended rather on the emancipation from work, work being that bounded and alienated part of life activity. Césaire in particular would seem to be anticipating Jacques Lacan in the rejection of work *tout court*, as for Césaire—as well as Horkheimer and Adorno—it represents an instrumental framing of the world at odds with a heightened poetic

the highly influential lectures being given at the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes* by the philosopher Alexandre Kojève, whose reading of the *Phenomenology* emphasized the work of what Hegel termed “determinate negation” in the achievement of self-consciousness. Hegel argues that the Subject is “in truth actual only in so far as it is the movement of positing itself, or is the mediation of its self-othering with itself.” . . . Such “self-othering” involves not a pretension to a secure and self-contained identity, but instead the continual confrontation with what is not the self: in other words, self-consciousness requires “the tremendous power of the negative [*ungeheure Macht des Negativen*].” . . . In his lectures of 1934–35, Kojève elaborates at length on the importance of “determinate negation” in the achievement of true or “revealed” Being through what Hegel calls “speculative logic”: “The negation of A has a positive or specifically determined content because it is a negation of A, and not of M or N, for example, or of some undetermined X. Thus, the ‘A’ is preserved in the ‘non-A’; or, if you please, the ‘A’ is ‘dialectically overcome’ (*aufgehoben*) in the ‘non-A.’ And that is why the non-A is not pure Nothingness, but an entity that is just as ‘positive’—i.e., determined or specific, or better, identical to itself—as the A which is negated in it: the non-A is all this because it results from the negation of a determined or specific A.” In other words, negation does not annihilate or destroy the negated element; instead that quality is preserved as that which defines the Subject (through what it is not). The parallel with the *Cahier* should be evident: Césaire defines *Négritude* in the anaphoric passage I quoted earlier (“my *Négritude* is not a stone . . .”) through precisely this understanding of negation as the creation of a “positive” content by its differentiation from a series of items of “determined” symbolic valence within technocratic Western modernity (“stone,” “leukoma,” “tower,” “cathedral”). As Kojève puts it, “The freedom which is realized and manifested as dialectical or negating Action is thereby essentially a creation. For to negate the given without ending in nothingness is to produce something that did not exist; now, this is precisely what is called ‘creating.’ . . . What is involved is not replacing one given by another given, but overcoming the given in favor of what does not (yet) exist, thus realizing what was never given.” . . . One might argue, indeed, that determinate negation becomes a crucial element in Césaire’s understanding of literary expression more broadly.⁸⁹

This is very powerfully argued indeed, and all the more powerful, I believe, because it does not focus, as Nesbitt at points does, on Hegel’s dialectic of

remember that Senghor was convinced of the familial relationship between German and African epistemology under the sign of the Ethiopian cultural type.³¹ A persistent critic of ocularism and *opsis*, Dilthey located the source of the problem in the same place as Senghor: Descartes, whose excessively detached and spectatorial account of our relation to reality results in perception becoming, as Eric Matthews has put it, “a window on to things, as if we were locked in a room in a house from which we were gazing on to the world outside, a place in which we ourselves played no part at all.” Rather than building bridges to the world, Dilthey invoked that in *Erlebnis* one was as certain of the outside world as one is of himself. One’s living experience of objects was quite different from that of the observation of “the dead and passive objectivity which resembles images in the mirror.”³² Rather than objects simply causally affecting our sense organs, our conative and affective sides affect, and indeed are constitutive of, the lived experience of objects. As a result, our experience is inherently meaningful; experientially implicit meanings, interests, and values are at work in perception, not simply superadded to it, and they are as real, factual, and objective as the purely physical processes that science attempts to disclose.³³ Life, thus, became not a call for irrationalism but for a richer understanding of perception and lived experience as they actually are, richer than what is captured in the scientific renderings of abstract-mathematical and classificatory discourse. As Eric Matthews has put it:

The “meanings” that we find in the world are no longer, as they were for Descartes and his empiricist and intellectualist heirs, the simple result of causal processes whereby situations in the world give rise to processes in the central nervous system that we experience as sensations of pleasure and pain. Instead, they become part of a reciprocal relationship in which the human body becomes the expression of a certain way of being in the world.³⁴

What Senghor calls participant reason, Merleau-Ponty referred to as a “vertiginous proximity [that] prevents us from both apprehending ourselves as a pure intellect as separate from things and from defining things as pure objects lacking in all human attributes.”³⁵

To put the point another way, Senghor shared in what Martin Jay has called the critique of the ocular, in particular of Bergson’s implicit linking of the domination of the eye with the deathlike rigor mortis.³⁶ Productive of a cold and calculating objectification of the environment and distance

between spectator and the object seen, vision thus (putatively) undermines a “more harmonious, benevolent and empathetic awareness of our surroundings,” while hearing and touch establish “the possibility of genuine intersubjectivity, of a *participatory communion* of self and other” through shared immersion in feeling and sound.³⁷ As Senghor, doubtless reflecting the sensibility of a poet who has touched his listeners with the spoken word, himself wrote:

Until the twentieth century, the European always separated himself from the object in order to know it. He kept it at a distance. I add that he always killed it, and fixed it in his analysis to be able to use it in practice. . . . However paradoxical it may seem, the vital force of the Negro African, his surrender to the object, is animated by reason. Let us understand each other clearly; it is not the *reasoning-eye* of Europe, it is the *reason of touch*, better still, the reasoning embrace, more closely related to the Greek *logos* than to the Latin *ratio*. For *logos*, before Aristotle, meant both reason and the word. At any rate, Negro-African speech does not mold the object into rigid categories and concepts without touching it; it polishes things and restores their original color, with their texture, sound, and perfume; it perforates them with its luminous rays to teach the essential surreality in its innate humidity—it would be more accurate to speak of subreality. European reasoning is analytical, discursive by utilization; Negro-African reasoning is intuitive by participation.³⁸

Senghor’s critique of visual realism is not simply irrationalist. His ideal is less antiocularism than synaesthesia, the working together of different senses in our experiencing of reality. At one level, then, Senghor and the other *Négritude* poets were not instinctualists but intuitionists, with intuition working as a middle category between reason and instinct; they also tried to do away with the spectator model of perception for a participatory one and with mechanistic explanations, which always did violence to the phenomena of lived experience. There was nothing inherently reactionary about this part of their program insofar as it attempted to open up cognitive possibility rather than essentialize African perception as the simple other of a caricatured West. Often, for the *Négritude* poets, art was simply to bring to light those aspects of being in the world as experienced without theoretical presuppositions that did violence to them.

Bringing together anti-Cartesian philosophy, Western ethnography, and African cultural forms and cadences, Senghor grappled with philo-

wishes to “fish out the baleful tongue of night.” For partial illumination of the “black hole” figure the reader may recall of one of earlier pseudo-definitions of *Négritude* offered in the poem, where it was described as an *activity* of excavation (“it penetrates [*trou*] the dark debasement of its righteous patience”). The black hole (*trou*), then, may be read as an internal cross-reference, signifying, among other things, the spiritual space uncovered by the poet’s persistent probing of the depths of plural black identity. In this account, the figure of “fishing” in the black hole points to the never-quite-concluded quest for an authentic self—a search that is not without the danger of “drowning” in a vast sea of racial consciousness. The poem’s closure, then, is intimately bound up with the complex thematic trajectory it has followed throughout. The liberation that *Cahier* envisions is ultimately the freedom to re-examine ready-made identities—fragmentary models of the self—and to remake them into an integrated whole with the connivance of an engaged reader.⁸⁷

Davis suggests that this vitalist understanding of *Négritude* not as a thing or a predicate noun but as a verb, as living activity, is implicit in Césaire’s syntax:

Négritude is positively defined not by predicate nouns (like its opposite number) but by verbs (*plonge, troue*: delves, penetrates). The shift to verbs strongly indicates that *Négritude* is not be regarded as a state, but an activity—an activity of self-exploration, of “delving” into the psycho-social unconscious. *Négritude* is nothing less than the ongoing process itself, the subterranean interior journey.⁸⁸

For Nick Nesbitt, this dynamic of identity formation through negation, laid bare in dramaturgical terms by Davis and already outlined by Sartre in *Black Orpheus*, suggests a Hegelian influence mediated via Kojève’s emphatic focus on the struggle for recognition in the dialect of master and slave. Brent Edwards has recently revised Nesbitt’s challenging reading:

Nick Nesbitt’s recent study *Voicing Memory* offers the most thorough consideration of the work of negation in the poetics of the *Cahier*. Nesbitt argues convincingly that the subject of Césaire’s poem can be read as a sort of “aesthetic analogue” to the “heroic subject” in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The intellectual world of Paris in the 1930s, Nesbitt points out, was very much animated by the rediscovery of Hegel, especially through

by a cursed venereal sun.”⁸³ Césaire calls upon “these tadpoles hatched in me by my prodigious ancestry!”⁸⁴ Of *Négritude* he cries out: “Make me resist any vanity, but espouse its genius / as the fist the extended arm! / Make me a steward of its blood . . .”⁸⁵

Yet *Notebook* reveals against manifest authorial intention some ambivalence about simply being fundamentally black, for Césaire rejects so many black identities, one persona after another, masks that his own Antillean displacement and Nietzschean radicalism disallows him, unlike Senghor, from ever wearing comfortably. That Césaire insists on the plural form of black (*negre*) suggests already the distance from an essentialist and reductionist idea of blackness. For this sensitive reading of Césaire’s work, we are indebted to Gregson Davis’s study of Césaire’s poetics. He writes of *Notebook*:

It is consonant with the poem’s figurative texture to conceive it as a drama of self-exploration in which the speaker typically *impersonates* differing versions of the self and holds them up to merciless scrutiny. It will be useful to think of these discrete identities as masks (in the ritual-dramatic sense) that the poet assumes and discards at the dictates of his plot. From this perspective, *Négritude*, which many readers might regard as the defining theme of *Cahier*, can be interpreted not as a static datum or essence, but as a plastic concept in the process of construction. . . . In a word, the poem undogmatically explores the “fit” of various racial selves (masks of *Négritude*, so to speak) from contingent vantage points.⁸⁶

Césaire stages a turning away from *persona*, which in Roman jurisprudence originally derived from the function of an actor’s stage mask; the mask enables the actor to conceal his real identity and to conform to the role written for him. To our postmodern sensibilities it is comforting—though, alas, misleading—to underline that Césaire’s narrator actually tries on and searingly rejects black personae while only proclaiming a fundamental African identity. Gregson Davis puts the point brilliantly in his discussion of the poem’s ending:

Despite the intimation of apotheosis implied in the motif of a ritual ascension, the poem’s finale re-focuses our perception of *Négritude* as a *process* of self-exploration and recuperation. This re-focusing is mainly facilitated by the mention of “the great black hole” (*grand trou noir*) in which the speaker previously wished to drown, but from which he now

sophical and poetic language to capture this way that we actually are in the world prior to any distortion that resulted in the alienation of subject from object and subject from subject. For dubious psychopsychological reasons, Senghor believed that Africans were the least predisposed to Cartesian ocularism. Indeed, he maintained not that Africans experience life as participation between mystical and earthly forces but that Africans experience the oneness of life.

Searching for the basic continuity not so much in our individual psychic lives but between ourselves and others, Senghor seems to have sought it in the fact that we all participate in life and that in lived experience we are not alienated. Simply not properly appreciated (perhaps out of a mischievous cultural relativism) is the extent to which Senghor is best understood as the African Bergson and the father of a racial modernism. This contradicts Jean-Paul Sartre’s interpretation of Senghorian *Négritude* as “spermatic”; however, like Lawrence, Senghor often heroically fails to prevent the collapse of his “participatory reason” into irrationalism and biologism. It has become commonplace to dismiss Senghor’s famous juxtaposition of African emotion and Greek reason as antirationalist and emotivist; in a more generous reading, as I have been suggesting, Senghor, who privileged *logos* (the word) over *ratio*, here is only anti-intellectualist and intuitionistic, closer to Dilthey in important ways than a caricatured Dionysian Nietzsche.

To so expand the reach of the cognitive, Senghor’s epistemology was, to put it another way, subtractive or, rather, it expanded the reach of the cognitive through subtraction. Here Bergson proves important yet again. For Bergson, intuition is actually an active (and difficult) mental operation meant to make experience immediate. It is not a form of irrationalism, much less instinctualism. To then free Senghor from the charge of instinctualism and simple irrationalism, it is important to understand how Bergson theorized the intuiting of the immediate. To recall from the last chapter, Milič Čapek has argued that for Bergson the immediate was exactly not what constitutes our sensory data as in empiricist philosophy but only that sensory data in as much as it is “freed from irrelevant and extraneous elements which, so to speak, ‘mediate’ it.”³⁹

In other words, an immediate relation to other objects does not come through the casting off of cognitive equipment in a frenzied return to instinct. Senghor would surely not have agreed that intuition or what he called participant reason has nothing in common with emotion, but he did share with Bergson the interest in freeing ourselves through concentrated

mental action from dependence on ordinary tools for thought—the linearization of time, the logic of solid bodies, and the epistemological privileging of sight over hearing and touch. These tools do not allow us to experience flows in time but frame experience in terms of space. Objects are solidified into separate beads on a necklace, and to know something is to see it and place it in a grid of categories. But for Bergson, reality is motion and the interpenetrated unity of an always unfolding duration ceaselessly yielding qualitative change. To recall another point from the last chapter: if, for example, mathematical or clock time is endlessly repetitious, as it is a string of homogeneous, infinitely divisible moments juxtaposed and mutually external to one another, the musical refrain is evidence of time's dynamic heterogeneous multiplicity of succession without separateness.⁴⁰ Even the repetition of notes in the same homogenous unit of time introduces a qualitative change, since time is experienced not as discrete multiplicity or as juxtapositions in metaphoric space but as continuity, as interpenetration.

Senghor's poetry explored the epistemological advantages that intuition as a mode of cognition had over rationalism and scientism: an appreciation of singularity and uniqueness; an awareness of the holistic nature of things and of their interconnection with other things; a comprehension of underlying, more fundamental processes of which ordinary things are only reifications, of life as a process and as a dynamic principle pervading the universe; and an access to the true flows of nature, love, music, and personal duration, allowing one to create and innovate rather than re-present the world as frozen and fixed. In this sense, Senghor's *Négritude* remains historically important as a salvo in an open anthropology of the senses. As he writes:

The Negro today is richer with gifts than with works. . . . The very nature of emotion, of the sensibility of the Negro, explains his attitude before the object, perceived with such an essential violence. It is an abandon that becomes need, active attitude of communion, indeed of identification, as small as the action—the personality of the object, I was going to say—maybe. *Rhythmic* attitude. May we retain the word.⁴¹

Unlike other mystics, Senghor did not maintain that the way the world is cannot be expressed to justify a retreat into silence. But Senghor's epistemology has to be freed from Bergsonian absolutism, which can only interfere with the play of language and devalue the importance of scientific and technological framing as less true than participant reason. The gift of

be more enhancing of life; relatively immune to a triumphant Western historical narrative and contemptuous racist dismissal of African beliefs, the *Négritude* poets opened themselves to anthropology and to non-Western knowledge systems, to what had not been absorbed in the dialectic of history. As noted, Arnold underlines that Césaire's knowledge of Africa was mediated through Western Romantic anthropology, though African belief systems may well have organized those folktales that had survived the Atlantic holocaust. (Césaire and Ménéil, we should remember, did publish a collection of folktales and may have had more exposure to these traditions than Arnold allows.) Yet one need not accept the neo-Herskovitsian thesis of African retentions, which simply stated that Mother Africa had something to teach and that her living culture had not been completely obliterated in the course of colonialism and the middle passage.⁸⁰

Césaire's Returns

While Dipesh Chakrabarty, who has poignantly heralded Senghor as the precursor of the postcolonial ideal of an incarnate subject, one who inhabits his natal tradition with openness to cross-fertilization, the more interesting figure for me is Césaire.⁸¹ Césaire understands the incarnate subject through the Bergsonian expression *le négro fondamental*, dismissed by Confiant as the myth of an inherited African substratum only overlain by a European veneer. In an interview with René Depestre, Césaire would implicitly dismiss the influence not only of European modernism but also Antillean Creole culture:

I reasoned in the following fashion: I said to myself, "If I apply the surrealist approach to my particular situation, I can call up the forces of the unconscious." For me this was the call to Africa. I told myself: "It is true that superficially we are French, we are marked by French customs. We are marked by Cartesianism, by French rhetoric, but if one breaks through this, if one descends to the depths, one can discover the fundamental African."⁸²

In *Notebook*, the Caribbean Césaire speaks of "a river of turtledoves / and savanna clover which I carry forever in my depths of height- / deep as the twentieth century floor of the most arrogant houses and as a guard against the putrefying force of crepuscular surroundings, surveyed night and day

mysterious property that fluctuates independently of the will of people and that no physical inspection or chemical analysis has yet found the material basis thereof. The vogue and popularity of the “magical real” is not only a result of the modern subject’s yearning for a “lost” connection with nature or states of enchantment; it is also symptomatic of our own disavowal of the contemporaneity and persistence of animistic and fetishistic worldviews in our daily lives—modernity is itself an enchanted world.⁷⁹ The penchant for primitive worldviews derives from modern entanglements, not from the kind of inherited, quasi-biological, racial memory invoked at times by Bergson, Freud, Jung, and the *Négritude* poets.

Rather than search for the reasons for the hold of archaic belief systems in antimodern and irrationalist philosophy or in the incompleteness of modernization itself, it would be more productive in accounting for the uncanny familiarity of animist beliefs to follow Adorno in rejecting our false, Weberian understanding of the modern as disenchanting. Yet the irony remains that having taken as a given the division between the disenchanted world of abstraction and the world of the enchanted primitive, the modernist avant-garde (*Négritude* included) yearned to return to an age of fetishes.

However, whatever the motivations to study ethnography, it oversteps, I believe, to imply that *Négritude* did not learn from those early attempts, however flawed and marred by the times, to understand African beliefs in their integrity. The *Négritude* thinkers were right not to dismiss African worldviews as naïve or mythical or simply inferior, nonreflective forms of minor Western philosophies. It simply misses the depths of the Western crisis not to recognize that *Négritude* poets thought it unassailable in the light of the West’s apocalyptic violence, now turned on itself, that its form of reason was itself based on myth: myths of the manipulability of nature as dead matter and of the Cartesian individual as an isolated, self-subsistent atom and thus paranoid and instrumental in relations. Such European haughtiness about the singularly rational basis of Western thought and its annihilative power over any alternative form of thought would have been at best risible to those witnessing Western implosion.

Moreover, one can understand the Hellenomania of nineteenth-century Europe as rooted not in an atavistic racial memory or even purely in romantic nostalgia but also in both the continuing influence of Greek art on modern conceptions and the unsurpassable nature of its achievements in, say, the epic form. For the *Négritude* thinkers, the vitalist African worldview was not drawn simply from consanguinity but rather because it was believed to

rhythm may qualify blacks for poetry and music, but such an essentialization of the African personality threatens to validate our colonial disqualification in science, technology, and even aesthetic experimentation. The epistemological subtraction of the quasi-Kantian thought form of linear time need not allow us to know the essence of things in order to remain important for the cognitive enrichment it may enable.

I shall now turn at last to Senghor’s controversial and more openly contested essentialization of the subject. Here the problems are profound and intractable, and again Bergson proved crucial as both inspiration and source of error, though this has yet to be explored in the vast literature on *Négritude*. As I have shown in the last chapter, one of Bergson’s most powerful ideas is that while individuals appear to be acting from self-interest, they are unaware that the self whose interest they try to promote is constructed for pragmatic social and instrumental reasons; unaware of this, they identify with this “self” as something truly individual and personal—in short, as “themselves.”⁴²

For Bergson, free action is true to individual character, and truth to character requires creative fidelity to one’s personal history, understood not in linear or sequential terms but in terms of an interpenetrated whole. Freedom is a matter of re-possessing oneself. Here it is important to remember that the animate can be distinguished from the inanimate precisely by its mnemonic force or ability to condense the past. Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, each birth came to seem less like the engendering of a unique work of art and increasingly understood in terms of reproduction.⁴³ Once distinguished by its ability to reproduce, life could be defined as that which physically embodies a physical memory by means of which the present is bound to the past. Biology opened up the possibility of defining life in terms of memory. Bergsonian mnemonic vitalism paradoxically demanded a creative fidelity to heritage or a renewal of tradition, insofar as the passage of homogeneous time itself did not guarantee its efficacy. Senghor’s *Négritude* was meant to recover the Bergsonian *moi fondamentale* for the African, yet—and this is a crucial difference—his theory of fundamental character breaks decisively with the solipsistic elements in Bergson’s. Indeed, Senghor’s strident anti-individualism, which was meant as a vindication of African communalism, eerily echoes the corporatist doctrine embraced by right-wing thinkers and mystifies the basis of social conflict within African societies. Senghor radicalizes the Bergsonian conception of the past to include the living and dead ancestors of one’s “race.” In short, he depersonalized the past.⁴⁴

In a later work, Abiola Irele captured this aspect of early *Négritude* writing:

The ideology of race . . . promoted by the theories of Africanism . . . [goes] hand in hand with movements of racial solidarity [and sustains] in the literature a form of Romanticism that seeks to legitimize and underwrite a myth of universal Black identity. In the African context this had had the largely salutary effect (though not without its problems and contradictions) of a revaluation and celebration of indigenous cultures, a process exemplified in the *gravitas* that writers as different as Senghor and Achebe ascribe to the universe of life that they posit as their true antecedents (what Senghor called *le royaume d'enfance*, the realm of childhood) and which they stake their sense of origins. That the process of revaluation also embraces the modes of expression associated with the traditional world gives rise to what I have called an aesthetic traditionalism, a poetics of indigenism that shapes the formal structure of much of the imaginative literature. . . . The immediate import of these imaginative projections and intellectual efforts is perfectly clear: as counterdiscourses, they represent not only a repudiation of the negative representations of the “native” in the imperialist ideology, they also articulate the claim to an alternative cultural history to the Western. It is especially in this connection that theories of Africanism assume an incisive relevance for Black intellectuals in the New World, in what has come to be known, by analogy with the Jewish condition, as the Black diaspora. They imply a reinvestiture of the Black self, a reincorporation, in the strong sense of the word, that establishes a new compact of the racial and historical community through congruence with its origins. For the Black intellectual in Africa and the African diaspora, severed from a sense of immediate connection, with the original community, an appeal to the background of African traditional life and history represents a form of spiritual homecoming, a *nostos*.⁴⁵

I am more skeptical than Irele of the effects of the conservative Bergsonian theory of identity on *Négritude*, for what Senghor has arguably done is accept the Marxist myths of the primitive communism and technological aversiveness of African societies, that is, the myth that they had not changed as a result of and thus cannot be explained by internal class contradictions conditioned by productive development. It follows from the myths of primitive classlessness and technology that there did indeed exist, buried in the African soul, an essential African culture timelessly fixed by its environment. In this context, Senghor's attraction to Maurice Barrés' provincial

others gradually come to assume no other form in these authors' remarks than that of the shadow of our own remorse and anxiety. They are a western product meant for the use of the West . . .⁷⁵

But *Négritude* thinkers did not seek to consign African cultures to a lost past from which we can now only learn but to see them as the living basis for cultural renewal.

As already implied, James Arnold contests *Négritude*'s self-presentation as a neo-Africanist poetry, arguing that the cultural prism that these artists qua Western subjects inherited and through which they perceive saw the world was the product of European modernism. Arnold is surely correct that Césaire “did not dredge up Mother Africa from some atavistic racial memory.”⁷⁶ Writing against the Africanist critic Jahn, who saw the poetics of *Négritude* as the modern incarnation of *Muntu*, the aesthetic invocation of an African “life force,” Arnold explains that it would be foolish to read Césaire as a neo-African artist whose poetics were the equivalent of African word-magic. Arnold avers—and I obviously follow him here—that it is a simpler and more probable hypothesis that Césaire's critique of Western metaphysics did not derive from a racial memory of African Hantu but rather a meditation on Bergson's *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*.⁷⁷ Indeed, Césaire's Africa is a constructed one, drawn from ethnographic texts and not mainly from a lived exposure to the culture, and the ethnographic texts themselves often projected nonrational, Western philosophies onto Africans. Arnold goes on to draw from Césaire's biography, noting that he had far too literate an early education to have been fully immersed even in the folkloric tradition of Martinique; thus, the African retentions he alludes to had to be for all practical purposes inaccessible to him. Césaire, he concludes, is “culturally a white poet”—a modernist—because his Africa is not a dictation from his unconscious but from his creative readings of ethnography.⁷⁸

To be sure, the uncanny familiarity of animist belief systems for the *Négritude* thinkers may have resulted neither from African survivals and racial memory (as the *Négritude* thinkers sometimes fantastically believed) nor only from irrationalist Western philosophy (as Arnold suggests) but also from their thorough enmeshment as modern subjects in the fetishistic world of commodities. If animism allows things and natural processes to be endowed with will, intent, and purposiveness, we moderns handle those inanimate things called commodities as carriers not only of various respective concrete use values but of the supersensuous attribute of value itself, a

the aesthetics of the young Lukács, intention and completed work are separated by an irrational leap) and partly because the experiences evoked by the work are *eo ipso* the receiver's own experiences. The quality of these experiences—that which makes the experiences unique to the receiver and the effect of the work of art immediate and particular—can never correspond in any way to that of the experiences of the artists.

This process of self-discovery through the work, the experience of being affected by it at the innermost and most personal level—whose endless repeatability forms the basis of its eternal influence—precludes any possibility of a sharing of experience between creator and audience. The possibility of misunderstanding, which in empirical reality was only *verite de fait*, becomes here a *verite eternelle*. The inadequacy of everyday processes of communication, the possibility of “misunderstanding,” is not abolished by art; it is merely eternalized. It is changed from an empirical to a constitutive category.⁷³

The *Négritude* poets believed that they were uniquely positioned to overcome two crucial dualisms: the tragic separation between audience and creator of which Márkus so eloquently speaks and the essential gap that separates representation from its object. As for the first contradiction, these colonial intellectuals felt that despite their elite origins, they were indeed bearers of a communal cultural tradition. As just noted, this was certainly the case for the intellectuals of *Négritude*, for whom the belief in a shared, animist, African cultural experiential base, a vitalist ontology with their countrymen, provided the basis for their visionary cultural nationalism. In this understanding, politics, art, culture, and the social are mutually constitutive elements. The work of art could finally have a socially valid existence.

Yet the postcolonial generations would soon tire of such views of traditional culture, to which the *Négritude* thinkers had putatively given precedence over real political and economic conflicts in the national culture of the riven present.⁷⁴ In fact, *Négritude*'s claim to cognitive superiority came to be understood as a romantic nostalgia for the past—a nostalgia that was itself a Western projection. Marc Augé would write of romantic anthropologists who:

are concerned to delineate the phantom of an ideal primitive society, full of meaning, still close to the most basic of desires and removed from the repressions that as yet only haunt it: the negative or lost world of a world (our own) that lives only for writing, axiomatics and capital. Thus the

loyalties is hardly surprising and deserves short mention, as it points to the dangers of depersonalizing Bergsonian concepts. Senghor would openly admit: “When I arrived in France, I was educated . . . by provincial priests. I was mostly a monarchist. I was very influenced by Barrés [who] helped me to know and love France better, but, at the same time, he reinforced me in the feeling of *Négritude*, by placing the accent on race, or at least on the nation.”⁴⁶

Marcien Towa would call on African intellectuals to abandon any such descent into the self. He emphasized that Africa is a continent so complex and mired in difficulties that one can hardly indulge an endless dialogue on the nature of its true identity. Thus Africans needed to focus on what they need to become, not what they uniquely are:

The desire to be one's self immediately leads to the proud reappropriation of one's past, because the essence of the self is no more than the culmination of its past; however, when the past is examined and scrutinized lucidly, dispassionately, it reveals that contemporary subjugation can be explained by reference to the origins of the essence of the self, that is to say in the past of the self and nowhere else.⁴⁷

Through his poetic calls for an African unity grounded in blood, Senghor spoke, however, of mystically connecting the individuations of the absolute reality of the life force through mutual native sympathy rather than in (as Michael Weinstein has perceptively put it) “exchange, power, deference and obligation.”⁴⁸ In Bergsonian terms, formal political order and contract were based on analysis—*ordre géométrique*—rather than an understanding of the deep, internal unity social reality—*ordre vital*. Drawing on the Bergsonian theologian Teilhard de Chardin, Senghor would later elaborate this vision of a creative activity at work in the world, yielding individual human beings as the highest achievement only to date. Senghor would survey the physical and social sciences for evidence that our individual and discrete personalities were not the ultimate products of this life force and that we were already witnessing, especially in newly emerging African socialisms, Teilhard's vision of a hyperpersonal order through which the personal wills of individual being are merged into a larger organismic spiritual unity. But in such a vision, the basis and reality of social disagreement are simply eliminated through mutual spiritual identification and collective spiritual identification with a perduring African essence.

The criticism here is of course not new, but that essentialism had roots in Bergson's mnemically vitalist theory of the fundamental self has been

overlooked. Rather, essentialism has been critically explicated as strategic, defensive, or reductively petty bourgeois. But this is to miss its profound philosophical foundations. Irele long ago underlined the centrality of Bergson to Senghor's vision of *Négritude*, which was above all else a reckoning of what was living and dead in the philosophy of Henri Bergson. It is slowly coming to recognition today that Bergson was the most important philosopher of the last century in terms of aesthetic and social influence, but the intellectual and dramatic importance of Senghor's critical Bergsonism has hardly received the attention it deserves. Such rigorous attention will enable the theoretical and critical engagement with Negritude that its ambition, depth, and historical importance demands.

Connecting Epistemology and Cultural Morphology

Aimé Césaire's critique of reason combined elements from Bergson's and Nietzsche's vitalism. While by the end of the chapter I shall have insisted on the greater complexity of Césaire's poetics and vision in comparison to Senghor's, they both remain united by and committed to a rather strong form of racial identity, and in this section I shall explore the philosophical importance of ethnography to their shared vision of *Négritude*. As James Arnold has noted, Césaire's debt to Bergson is allusively but decisively noted in his paper "Poetry and Cognition," which was delivered in 1947 to a meeting of professional philosophers. Only one professional philosopher is spared in Césaire's general condemnation of accepted modes of reasoning. Bergson is the unmistakable guarantor of this enthusiastically proclaimed truth: "Surrender to the vital movement, to the creative élan. Joyous surrender."⁴⁹ Arnold notes that Bergson's influence shows in Césaire's insistence on the silences of scientific knowledge, in his critique of the law of noncontradiction, and in his defiance of academic neo-Kantianism. Michael Dash has referred to Césaire as poet of *verrition*—Césaire's own neologism for a sweeping or stripping away. In this essay, whose importance to the philosophical understanding of *Négritude* was unfortunately eclipsed by Jean Paul Sartre's introduction to *Black Orpheus*, we see Césaire recommending a sweeping and stripping away not of social forms but of discursive knowledge and scientific cognition, due to the contradictions and antinomies it creates (Zeno's paradoxes). Césaire calls here for an apocalyptic act of self-invention and a return to primordial reality via poetry. This is more than a simple primitivism, which is a call for a temporal

that the earlier vitalism had divided human beings into "two classes, the one living out life and the other torn from it," he argued that the cleft that appeared after the First World War was now within the subject, resulting eventually in what Adorno called the jargon of authenticity—the sometimes pathetic and often violent search for authentic, vital modes of being.⁷² But for colonial intellectuals, the cleft remained social and had indeed become world historical with their living cultures, organically conceived, standing against the moribund West.

Indeed, the *Négritude* poets also exuded confidence that their emergent cultures would transcend the fatal dualism between art and life that, according to the young Romantic Lukács, Western thought tragically had not been able to do. That tragic sense of dualism is worth considering at length for the contrast it provides, and it is well related here by one of Lukács' last students, György Márkus:

The relationship between life and the soul, the soul's great power over life and the transcendence of alienation that is represented by art (and by every other valid cultural "work"), cannot of itself solve the immediate problems of life raised by its dualistic, antagonistic nature. Art transcends the alienation of ordinary life, it also inevitably breaks away from it, and breaks away sharply, simply because it is totally self-enclosed, a complete universe in itself. It is a new life, which, as it is self-contained and complete in itself, has (and can have) no point of contact with anything beyond itself from the moment it comes into being. The relationship between the work of art and life (the reception of art), therefore, can never be anything but momentary contact between different spheres, through which "inauthentic life" can never be redeemed. One can perceive a meaning in life in and through the work, but that does not mean that one can order one's own life accordingly or invest it with meaning.

Equally, art cannot abolish the inadequacies of human communication that isolate the individual—not only because of the inevitably elitist character of artistic communication (the concept of "genius" is one of the young Lukács' basic categories) but also because of its inherent nature. The work of art forges a universally valid link between creator and audience, since the link is created exclusively by the form objectified in the work. For precisely this reason, however, the link can never be adequate as far as content is concerned, partly because the world view objectively embodied and expressed in the form of the work does not necessarily stand in any relationship to the views and intentions of its creator (according to

the Romantic nations. Of course, the idea of joining of the German and African spirit would have been repudiated by the European fanatics of race, and one suspects that Senghor was not innocent of—and may well have been amused by—how deconstructive of fascist racial theory his racial cultural pluralism was. More specifically, Senghor embraces the Ethiopian here to support values against the modern technindustrial West, whether manifested in Hitler's Germany or imperial France. Both he and Suzanne Césaire obviously thought that Germany had lost its grounding in German mysticism.

A sympathetic reading of the *Négritude* thinkers would underline their sympathy with the *Frühromantiks*, by whose embrace they meant to articulate opposition to the colossal, imperial machine that Germany had become. As argued by Pheng Cheah and Michael Rosen, early German Romanticism, both as nature philosophy and political theory, is in important ways different from fascist ideology. The enthusiasm for Frobenius's Romantic anthropology should not be simplistically read as an acceptance of the premises of an inverted racism. Indeed, Senghor's sympathy with the *Frühromantiks* refracted here through Frobenius's ethnography undercuts any totalistic judgment against the West, hardly the nuance of Hitlerite racism.

And while *Négritude* is often understood, even here by Suzanne Césaire, as a relativist defense of beleaguered people and culture, Senghor and Aimé Césaire did not simply think that African culture implicitly carried epistemological and ontological assumptions that were perfectly legitimate for it alone; rather, their vindication struck deeper. African culture was thought to be superior to others in important respects: it was a living carrier of what had been lost in the course of Eurasian historical development and of what could be regained if the human catastrophes of cold, mechanical, and murderous civilizations were not to mount further. In this sense, *Négritude* was less an abandonment of reason than reason applied to itself, which is similar to, as Eze has perceptively noted, Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. *Négritude*, in short, was not a simple variant of cultural relativism, one of many branches of a Darwinian bush: the defiant particularism of *Négritude* was paradoxically underwritten by its universalist aspirations for truth.⁷¹

At this point, it becomes clear why Lukács' understanding of vitalism does not apply to the colonial context. Lukács wrote, of earlier forms of vitalism, that they had been mainly concerned with rejecting “moribund formations” of social being and confronting them with “the vivacity of total subjectivity as the organ of the conquest of life.” Where Lukács found

escape to a prelapsarian state. Césaire is also interested in a phenomenological bracketing—that is, an attempt to connect with lived experience as it still and always is before reflective experience brings its logic of substances and abstract temporality to bear on it, a logic that can only yield the antinomies of the scientific mind and the conversion of motion into logical contradiction and impossibility. Still, there is a call for a new space-time, going to the past by a spatial return, a coming home to where an African tradition survives and can be recovered through a stripping away of the sedimented categories of colonial reason. Rising above the quotidian self, the poet, inspired during the creative act, can alone tap into the more substantial and original energies of the racial unconscious and the life force itself. The notion here converges on older “metaphysical notions of literal possession by gods and spirits in the act of true utterance.”⁵⁰ Césaire has married a Sorelian poetics of volcanic aggression with a Bergsonian call for a mystical return to a more intuitive and contemplative view of nature. In both aesthetics and epistemology, I would say that Césaire was also influenced by Nietzsche, a judgment Arnold doubtless shares. For example, while the references to Bergson's *élan vital* and critique of the intellect are clear, the idea of joyful surrender is also suggestive of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which the Dionysian redemption promises “the shattering of the individual and his fusion with primal being. . . . In the union of human beings with each other through forms of communication like song and dance the power of individuation is broken and the natural affinities among people are affirmed.”⁵¹ Ofelia Schutte notes that Nietzsche understood the principle of individuation as discontinuity from life:

The myth of Dionysus being torn to pieces by the Titans symbolizes the essential tragic insight that individuation is the cause of human suffering. Here the body of the god of life (Dionysus) represents the totality of existence, while the shattering of the totality into parts symbolizes the violent separation of the individual from the whole. Individuation separates one from the whole of life, and, as it were, condemns one to death. However, just as the state of individuation is regarded as one of suffering, so its transcendence or end is experienced as a source of joy.⁵²

Arnold does indeed insist that the Césairean hero is a lyrical and dramatic Black Overman, the exemplary sufferer through whose sacrifice the community is reborn. Yet Césaire was not an elitist; the poet was to help a

people be reborn as a community in which persons are not strongly individuated, in which their reason is not used to protect and advance their egos in alienation from the rest. Césaire's inspiration was surely the creation of a community without domination internal or external. This is the Nietzsche that Schutte elaborates, and it was doubtless Césaire's. For Nick Nesbitt, however, Césaire's Nietzschean dissolution of the self—"my hand puny" in the "enormous fist" of "my country"—leaves him defenseless against Stalinist worship of the totalitarian state, by which, he speculates, Césaire was inspired, and my criticism of Senghor's strident anti-individualism or corporatism is similar in this regard. It is indeed important to challenge whether Césaire summoned sufficient appreciation for the autonomous personality who must shoulder responsibility for his actions in the face of powerful desires to be freed from the constraints of individuality, to immerse oneself in the stream of life and to lose one's identity. Yet I want to underline the generally ecstatic nature of Césaire's anti-individualism, for the communal ecstasy shared in dance and song (rather than mass torch-lit rallies) does not threaten to obliterate the individual in a violent, intolerant crowd, much less a machinic and statist communism in which surrealist poets faced the same fate as did their species in *The Republic*.⁵³ We should not collapse Césaire's ecstatic politics for LeBon's crowd psychology of lynch mobs that, through ritual, ensconce invidious group identities. Astoundingly, our most vital experiences are ones in which we have minimal experience of self-consciousness. Vitalism gives recognition to such radically deindividuating experience.⁵⁴ Speaking of a celebration in an unimposing little church on a Christmas eve, Césaire writes: "And not only do the mouths sing, but the hands, the feet, the / buttocks, the genitals, and your entire being liquefies into sound, voices, and rhythms."⁵⁵ Such experience is then contrasted to the lassitude of everyday life in an impoverished colony: "At the end of daybreak, life prostrate, you don't know how to / dispose of your aborted dreams, the river of life desperately tor- / pid in its bed, neither turgid nor low, hesitant to flow, pitifully / empty, the impartial heaviness of boredom distributing shade / equally on all things, the air stagnant, unbroken by the bright- / ness of a single bird."⁵⁶ At the poem's beginning, Césaire had already described quotidian existence under colonial rule as lifeless. Michael Dash notes that the oppressive nature of colonialism is symbolized in the "three statues of Césaire's *Cahier*, where the conquistador d'Esnambuc, the empress Josephine, and the liberator Schoelcher are frozen in white marble."⁵⁷

Just as vitalism in biology served as a powerful reminder of the limits of mechanistic and reductionist science, Césaire's cultural vitalism evokes

Paideuma, from one sudden "shock" to another, in the same way as the vital forces passes from one mutation to another through the diversity of living species.⁶⁹

And Senghor would write:

We had to wait for Leo Frobenius before the affinities between the "Ethiopian," that is the Negro African, and the German could be made manifest and before certain stubborn preconceptions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries could be removed. One of these preconceptions is that the development of every ethnic group, and of humanity itself, is linear, univocal, passing from the Stone Age to the age of steam and electricity and to the atomic age of today. . . . Frobenius tells us that, like individuals, ethnic groups are diverse, even opposed, like the Hamites and the Ethiopians, in their feelings and their ideas, their myths and their ideologies, their customs and their institutions; that each group, reacts in its own peculiar way to the environment and develops autonomously; that though they may be at different stages of development, Germans and "Ethiopians" belong to the same spiritual family. And he concludes: "The West created English realism and French rationalism. The East created German mysticism . . . the agreement with the corresponding civilizations in Africa is complete." *The sense of the fact in the French, English and Hamitic civilizations—the sense of the real in the German and Ethiopian civilizations!*⁷⁰

To be sure, Frobenius's anthropological study of Ethiopian and Hamitic types may well have allegorized modern anti-Semitism; the Hamitic civilization was seen as the source of abstraction, while Cartesian rationalism produced analysis. Jews were often imagined as the destroyers of life; *Lebensphilosophie*, as I discussed in the last chapter, was often reducible to a veiled philosophical expression of anti-Semitism. Yet one suspects that Senghor was not attracted to Frobenius's cultural typology out of a prejudice toward Jews; fluent in German and having translated Goethe, Senghor was absolutely riven by the possibility of an affinity between early German Romanticism and the African world view. Yet, as the anthropologist Ita points out, Frobenius's elaborate topographies of African differences were often little more than a thinly veiled allegory of German nationalism—Germany's antagonists, France and Great Britain, would line up with the soulless Hamitic peoples, while life would be preserved by

people to come.”⁶⁶ Take, for example, this stanza from the *Notebook*: “Blood! Blood! all our blood aroused by the male heart of the sun / Those who know about the femininity of the moon’s oily body / The reconciled exultation of antelope and star / Those whose survival travels in the germination of grass.”⁶⁷

As the original recorder of this superior African ontology, Frobenius allowed the *Négritude* poets to repudiate a dialectical and linear scheme of history in which all gains are preserved and transcended, which allowed them to shatter the idea of objective progress, to find in African cultures, as the putative cradle of civilization, philosophical superiority in their recognition of the continuity and omnipresence of the life force. Frobenius’s great interest in Africa was framed in typically German Romantic reactions. Africa was of interest because it represented a pure shepherding of being rather than its instrumentalization; Africa was in effect a contemporary realization of a cultural *Ursprung*, a living example of early cultural formations superior in the understanding of being to Western technological society. Where Bergson had written in neoprimitivist language of the need to return “to the dawn of our human experience,” to “the world before man, before our own dawn,” Césaire would proclaim that man had never been closer to the truth of being than at his birth.⁶⁸ In the face of the promise of Western decline, the *Négritude* thinkers refused a contemptuous dismissal of apparently anachronistic, though in fact coeval, ways of knowing: truth was not manifestly an end result, a dialectical outcome of the historical process. In short, an African vitalist ontology held out the promise of the radical democracy implicit in the belief in an all-pervading life force and the possibility for reconciliation with nature and ourselves as we take ourselves and nature into deindividuating fellowship and applied the skills of social interaction. It took, however, the catastrophic ending of the West to allow for the countenancing of the possibility that there had been a loss of objective capacities and truthful experience.

In “Leo Frobenius and the Problem of Civilization,” Suzanne Césaire boldly revises the philosophy of history:

In fact Frobenius has discovered that the idea of continual progress, dear to the nineteenth century, which showed civilization as progressing in a single line from primitive barbarism to the highest modern culture, is a false idea. Humanity does not possess a will to perfection. To emphasize this, it does not create civilization and then try to take it ever higher. On the contrary, it develops in multiple directions transformed by the inner

the dimensions of human experience outside the grind of daily life and beyond the reach of self-conscious, monadic agents. Here Césaire has a clear debt to Nietzsche, and he seems to have read him as Heidegger did. Schutte helpfully outlines the Heideggerian interpretation of Nietzschean self-overcoming as the intensification of life:

Zarathustra . . . interprets all of existence as a process of will to power as self-overcoming. Here it is crucial to notice that in the process of intensification of life the boundaries of the self are not only dissolved but lose their authoritative and controlling function over the organism. . . . What is at stake is the overcoming of the schematizing self, the self which in terms of knowledge defines itself in contrast to the body and the passions, and which in terms of knowledge defines itself as the measure of all things, including the maxim that guarantees the validity of this measure. Nietzsche’s thesis of the will to power as self-overcoming is at once an affirmation of life through the notion of its intensification and a critique of the metaphysical notion of the self. Self-overcoming means the intensification of life by which all divisive (even if conserving) boundaries on life are destroyed or transcended. Self-overcoming involves the overcoming of the Apollonian principle of individuation and drive to permanence in favor of the greater reality of the Dionysian flow of existence in which the boundaries between the subject and object, time and eternity, disappear. Language, caught in the metaphysics of the self, must also be exposed for the ideology it perpetuates through its metaphysics of subject/predicate and its reification of boundaries. The task for the “artists’ metaphysics” with which Nietzsche meant to supplant the metaphysical tradition is the construction of a theory of meaning in which language no longer takes on this alienating function.⁵⁸

True to Dionysian experience, Césaire was also compelled to criticize language itself as both an impediment and inadequate to such experience. Nietzsche’s vitalist critique of language—that is, his contrast of life and language—was especially important to Césaire’s exaltation of the poetic as a cognitively superior mode. In all the studies of Nietzsche, the Hegelian philosopher Stephen Houlgate has provided us with perhaps the best sense of Nietzsche’s vitalist critique of the discursable, and I shall quote it at length:

In his writing, Nietzsche always endeavors to emphasise the prelinguistic life that underlies his language; the real Nietzsche is his body, blood,

instinct, and will, and language and intellect are mere vehicles of that physiological reality. Yet Nietzsche is also obsessed with the idea that his words alone cannot adequately communicate his fundamental physiological sense of experience of life's complexity. Nietzsche's texts are not therefore designed to introduce the reader to utterly new thoughts and experiences. His words are meant to serve as signs to remind us of thoughts we have already had, but which perhaps we have suppressed. Nietzsche's personal experience of life, it seems, can only be communicated in a very imperfect way, but if we have had similar experiences, we can be reminded of them by Nietzsche and our understanding of those experiences can be deepened. The intensity of the reader's own experience of life is thus what entitles him to understand Nietzsche's truth. The reader is therefore intended himself to supply the experiences which give Nietzsche's metaphors substance. The metaphors themselves only lay down the limits of interpretation. In the first main speech by Zarathustra, for example, the metaphors of the camel, lion and child delimit the experience of self-burdening, of wild, of "leonine" freedom and of innocent wholeness, but the vagueness of the metaphors means that the reader must draw upon his own individual experience to give precise meaning to the text. It is the experiential base which is meant to provide the context for deciding the sense of Nietzsche's utterances. However, it also means that we can never *define* what Nietzsche's own experience of life is. Nietzsche's words do not take us "into" the complexity of his experience; they leave uneasily on the surface of his world. Only our own experience of life can take us "inside" Nietzsche's.

In all of his writings Nietzsche's pre-linguistic sense of life provides the authentic basis, the dogmatic conviction, from which he proceeds. Nietzsche's "truths," his metaphorical statements describing life, are thus nothing other than *truthful* expressions of his own experience of life. Nietzsche's personal experience is indeed his main criterion of "truth." This of course puts Nietzsche's philosophy beyond any rational criticism which is independent of the experience of life. Any terms of the public language which we might use as a frame of reference for such a criticism are repudiated by Nietzsche on the basis of unassailable experience.⁵⁹

I believe that this precise concatenation of ideas animates "Poetry and Cognition," in which Césaire finds the way beyond the strictures of intellect not in a concentrated, Bergsonian act of nonsymbolic intuition, carried out in silence, but through the surrealist poetic tradition founded by

Baudelaire.⁶⁰ Because Césaire found truth and creativity in poetic language, he did not slip into the irrationalist, Bergsonian devaluation of language as a falsification of the *élan vital*. Truth is held to be beyond the discursable though within the reach of the poetic. Césaire would not find truth in silence or intuition.⁶¹ Césaire elevates metaphor against the sterile precision of science in the introduction of "Poetry and Cognition." I have already discussed in the previous chapter why poetry and metaphor were alone vested with the power to describe life, for its movements, interdependencies, and metamorphoses bring discursive knowledge to silence by its own law of noncontradiction and the stable entities on which it depends: living things do not abide by the principle of $A = A$ and find themselves in the excluded middle that the logic of solid bodies evacuates.

Césaire's confidence and the optimism of *Négritude* in general were based on his belief that the African cultural legacy provided blacks with a heightened experience of life that would allow an understanding of the metaphoric depiction of the continuity of life, which poetry would then amplify. The textual proof of this animist sensibility was found in the ethnography of Leo Frobenius, whose importance to the early *Négritude* thinkers has been beautifully analyzed by T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting.⁶² Whereas Schutte notes, "Nietzsche could not concretely imagine a universe where the continuity and flow of life would be part of one's daily social experience," whether in the areas of morality, social relations, or politics, Césaire was sure just such experience could be awoken by the African poet qua mystic.⁶³ The African's experiential base was understood as richer, closer to life. The *Négritude* poet-as-mystic would then help widen and deepen the intuitive, experiential mode only marginally recognized within European modernity and available only to poets and mystics.⁶⁴ Gregson Davis captures well Césaire's understanding: "the marvelous in its concrete, Caribbean incarnation was not, as it presumably became for the modern European, an artificially fabricated, escapist world of make-belief; rather it was present in the lived experience of people of African ancestry in their New World diaspora . . . the magical weapons turn out to be the cultural reserves of transplanted Africans."⁶⁵ But the poet Césaire needs the islanders of Martinique to serve as intercessors, for they still have contact with a living oral tradition. Yet the islanders also need Césaire, as the initiator of a communal task that revives group memory of their authentic ontology and instigates the invention of a new collectivity. Césaire and the islanders are "mutual intercessors, together engaged in the falsification of received truths" of African inferiority and the "legending" of a